cross + roads

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Hebrews 13:8

ESA parish disaffiliates from PECUSA and Diocese of Pennsylvania

The persisting tensions between the Diocese of Pennsylvania and the regional ESA parishes led recently to major new developments. On April 25, an official meeting of the voting membership of The Church of St. James the Less, Philadelphia, authorized vestry action legally to disaffiliate the parish from PECUSA and the Diocese of Pennsylvania to form an independent Anglican parish.

The parish's move, which has received national media attention in both religious and secular publications, is the first such occurrence in the diocese in 125 years. In 1874 another East Falls parish, Trinity Church, left the Diocese to join the newly established Reformed Episcopal Church.

Parish spokesmen emphasized that the choice to leave was a difficult one, made reluctantly and only after months of discussion (see the accompanying articles).

For decades the parish has consistently opposed the revisionist theology and morality now dominant in PECUSA as contrary to an orthodox understanding of both Scripture and Tradition.

It decided, however, to separate only when it became convinced that concerted measures were being taken to silence its orthodox witness altogether and force it into complete conformity with the national church and the Diocese. Citing an extensive pattern of adversarial statements and actions by Bp. Charles Bennison, the Diocese, and PECUSA in general, rector Fr. David Ousley stated, "We have concluded that our belief and practices as classical Anglicans are no longer to be tolerated within the Diocese."

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Bethlehem—City of Refuge

Despite protests by Pennsylvania's Bishop Charles Bennison and pressure from Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, Bishop Paul Marshall of the neighboring Diocese of Bethlehem allowed retired ESA Bishop Donald Parsons to confirm more than 35 parishioners from three Philadelphia-area ESA parishes at St. Stephen's, Whitehall, on May 18. The three parishes—St. John's, Huntingdon Valley; Good Shepherd, Rosemont; and All Saints' Wynnewood—have refused to receive visitations from Bp. Bennison and Suffragan Bp. Franklin Turner to protest their deviations from orthodox faith and practice. As a result, they have been denied episcopal visitations from ESA bishops since 1997.

A packed house greeted Bishop Parson's entrance at St. Stephen's as family and friends gathered for the confirmation of loved ones. Bishop Parsons reminded those gathered that this was a worship service, not a time to register protests about

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ESA goes Forward in Faith

In a bold move toward unity with other faithful Christians, the Episcopal Synod of America (ESA) died and rose again in a new body. At its annual gathering in Ft. Worth, Texas, May 29 – June 2, the group laid aside its ten-year identity as ESA and voted unanimously to become Forward in Faith, North America (FiF).

This decision links them as a self-governing body to Forward in Faith, England (which includes all of Europe) and Forward in Faith, Australia. Together they gain strength as a growing international presence of those trying to live out classical Christianity in the face of a Church drifting away from that which was entrusted to us by Christ and His apostles.

One of the most exciting reports at the meeting was a description of another recent gathering in Bartonville, Illinois, of representatives of four orthodox Episcopal bishops (ESA) with twelve bishops representing seven Continuing Anglican jurisdictions. They had

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Disaffiliation

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Background to disaffiliation

While actually triggered by recent events, the decision of St. James the Less to disaffiliate was not sudden, but has long-standing roots. Due to deep theological differences over the nature of the ordained ministry, the content of church liturgies, and scriptural standards of sexual moral conduct, the ESA parishes have for several years existed in a state of "impaired communion" with the Diocese and its bishops. As a result, the parishes have refused to receive diocesan episcopal visitations and have withheld the portions of their annual diocesan assessments designated to support the episcopate.

However, diocesan Bp. Allen Bartlett chose compromise over confrontation, and in 1995 reached a two-year trial accommodation with the ESA parishes. Known informally as the "Parsons Agreement," it provided for Bp. Bartlett to designate retired ESA Bp. Donald Parsons (Quincy, IL), a one-time interim rector of Good Shepherd, Rosemont, as an official episcopal visitor in his stead to the ESA parishes. In exchange, those parishes agreed to resume payment of their episcopal assessments. The arrangement worked smoothly, and many hoped that it would not only become permanent, but also be adopted as a national model by other diocesan bishops for their traditionalist parishes.

Events elsewhere contribute to disaffiliation

Beginning in 1997, however, a series of international, national and local developments significantly worsened the situation of the ESA parishes. The 1997 General Convention repealed an existing "conscience clause" on the ordination of women, mandating its acceptance and implementation within three years by all clergy and laity holding "positions of responsibility" in PECUSA, from bishops to vestrymen, in effect making the traditionalist position illegal. Other actions, such as approving church employee benefits for non-marital partners and discussing the development of trial liturgies for blessing homosexual "unions," significantly advanced an agenda for legitimizing extramarital sexual conduct. Shortly before the Convention, a panel of bishops had voted 7-1 to reject a presentment against retired Bp. Walter Righter for his willful ordination of practicing homosexuals to the priesthood, declaring in their ruling that PECUSA has no "core doctrine" on sexual morality.

In August 1998 the Lambeth Conference, a decennial international assembly of Anglican bishops convening in Canterbury, England, voted overwhelmingly to uphold orthodox Scriptural teaching on sexual morality, and also called for toleration and pastoral accommodation of dioceses and parishes that cannot in good conscience accept the ordination of women. However, these official statements have been widely ignored and rejected throughout PECUSA. At least 16 diocesan conventions have passed formal resolutions repudiating them, while others rejected resolutions endorsing them. Meanwhile, persecution of ESA parishes continued, with forced "visitations" staged by Bp. Jane Dixon in the Diocese of Washington D.C., and the seizure by the Diocese of Massachusetts of the property and assets of St. Paul's, Brockton, and the expulsion of its congregation onto the street (see Foundations, April and May 1999).

Actions against local ESA parishes lead to disaffiliation decision

Locally, the retirement of Bp. Bartlett in May 1998 brought renewed tensions. Under his successor, Bp. Charles Bennison, the Diocese discontinued existing agreements with area ESA parishes, sought to compel them to accept positions contrary to their stated convictions, and refused requests for discussions to find possible compromises. In 1996, Bennison had received the votes of several ESA parishes for election as bishop, as the only one of five candidates who pledged to continue the "Parsons Agreement." Following his consecra-

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From the Editor's Desk...

This issue of **cross+roads** is considerably longer than usual. The reason for this is that there has been considerably more activity in our local FiF parishes in the past few months. One parish voted to disaffiliate from the Diocese of Pennsylvania and the Episcopal Church. Three others aroused the ire of the diocesan bishop when they took their confirmands to another diocese to receive the sacrament of confirmation from an orthodox bishop.

These events have been widely publicized elsewhere in both secular and ecclesiastical publications. Although their articles have been fairly accurate, none has given the whole story. We've tried to do that here.

In these pages you'll find James Altena's insightful analysis of the events leading up to St. James's disaffiliation. He effectively covers all the angles—local, national, and international. His expertise as an historian is evident.

You'll also find the complete statement provided to Bishop Bennison and his advisory council when they met with the congregation of St. James the Less in June. It's a somewhat more concise summary of those events, given from the perspective of one vestry member.

The longest feature is a transcript of an interview with Fr. David Ousley, rector of St. James the Less, and vestry members Karl Spaeth and Becky Wilhoite. James Altena, playing the devil's advocate, posed some hard questions, which the trio adeptly fielded.

There are several brief articles—one on the confirmation service at St. Stephen's, Whitehall; one on the ESA's 10th Anniversary celebration in Fort Worth; and one on Bishop Bennison's June visit to St. James the Less.

Finally, there's a commentary by Barbara Bradley—her reflections on the relationship between truth and unity. Like many of us, she was amazed at the statement by a Yale professor who was quoted in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* as saying that Anglicans have always val-

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God, of your goodness, give me yourself for you are sufficient for me. I cannot properly ask anything less, to be worthy of you. If I were to ask less, I should always be in want. In you alone do I have all.

Julian of Norwich, 1342-1443

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tion, however, Bp. Bennison then declined to do so, claiming he had only agreed to allow it to finish its initial two-year term. After he rejected requests to renew the agreement or to discuss alternatives, five ESA parishes resumed withholding their episcopal assessments. Subsequently, in November 1998, with Bp. Bennison acting as chairman, the annual Diocesan Convention "expelled" those parishes for failure to pay their full assessments (see **cross✠roads**, December 1998).

Throughout the following months, the Diocese continued efforts to exert pressure against the ESA parishes (see **cross✠roads**, April 1999). At St. John's, Huntingdon Valley, an episcopal visitation scheduled by Bp. Bennison for December was cancelled when the parish refused to receive him. In January, a delegation of parish laity went to meet with the bishop, who indicated that he considered Fr. Lyman to be the main problem and wished to replace him with another rector. Remarkably, he also suggested that an "amicable separation" of the parish from the Diocese was possible. At a January 31 meeting, the voting membership of the parish authorized the vestry to explore this possibility. However, the parish has received no response to repeated requests for further discussions.

In February, the Diocese attempted to force All Saints', Wynnewood, and its rector, Fr. Richard Smith, to receive an episcopal visitation from Suffragan Bp. Franklin Turner, who refused to consider a previous compromise under which Bp. Bennison's predecessor, Bp. Bartlett, had attended Evensong and then addressed the congregation. Canonical action was threatened against Fr. Smith unless the parish consented to receive an episcopal visitation on the Diocese's terms by June 30.

Meanwhile, St. Luke's, Newtown, under a previous agreement with Bp. Bennison, paid its full diocesan assessment and received a visitation from Bp. Turner, in exchange for permission also to receive a visitation from an ESA bishop. After Bp. Turner's visitation, however, Bp. Bennison informed rector Fr. Larry Snyder that he was revoking the agreement and would never allow an ESA bishop to visit, since the ESA parishes had "not changed their views" to conform to those of the diocese. In response, three ESA parishes recently accepted an offer by Bp. Paul Marshall in the neighboring Diocese of Bethlehem to send members to St. Stephen's, Whitehall, for confirmation by a visiting ESA bishop (see the accompanying article).

Action against ESA curates a decisive factor

Beginning in January 1999, Bp. Bennison refused to renew the annual licenses of several curates serving in local ESA parishes who are not canonically resident in the Diocese (see Crossroads, April 1999). Some of the parishes ignored the bishop's action and retained their curates in active service. At St. James the Less, however, Fr. Arthur Willis suspended his active ministry and remained present as an ordinary parishioner. By depriving the parish of the ministry of a godly priest in good standing, the bishop's action demonstrated to many parishioners a profound lack of pastoral concern and convinced them that the parish no longer had a viable place in the Diocese.

In several telephone conversations, Bp. Bennison originally told the curates that he had no complaints against them, but was seeking to apply pressure against the rectors and vestries of ESA parishes which had declared themselves to be out of communion with him as a heretical teacher and had refused to receive his visitations. In the June *Pennsylvania Episcopalian*, however, Bp. Bennison stated that he refused to re-license those curates "who have been, by their own admission, committed to assisting the rectors who are in the process of taking their congregations out of the Episcopal Church." In response, both Fr. Ousley and Fr. Willis pointed out that for years they have sought ways to keep the parish in PECUSA while still following Scripture and Tradition, despite an increasing lack of tolerance in PECUSA for orthodoxy.

Another key factor that persuaded the parish to consider disaffiliation was Bp. Bennison's refusal to recognize and honor the moral obligation and right of traditionalists to act in accordance with Scripturally informed conscience. At a June 1998 meeting with Fr. Ousley and the parish vestry, Bp. Bennison explicitly stated that traditionalists have no right to speak or act upon their convictions. Asked if PECUSA still had any place for traditionalists, he replied that "the boundaries are shifting" and that it was "unclear" if they were still within them. Throughout the meeting, his chief concern was for an administrative rather than pastoral relationship to the parish, defined in terms of the submission of the parish and its clergy to his office and canonical authority.

Disaffiliation: preparation and decision

Weighing the cumulative adverse impact of all these incidents and measures, the vestry of St. James the Less was at last moved to consider disaffiliation of the parish from PECUSA. The challenge was to find a way, both Scriptural and legal, to do so. One option was simply to leave the property and depart. However, as the only active church in a struggling city neighborhood, with preparations well underway to open an elementary school in September 1999, the vestry decided that the parish had a calling to continue a Christian witness and ministry in a community that otherwise would not have it. Likewise, heeding St. Paul's injunction that Christians should not take one another to court, the vestry decided that, even at an increased risk of losing the property, it should not file preemptive legal action against the Diocese to lay claim to parish assets.

Instead, shortly after Easter 1999, the vestry initiated formal action for disaffiliation. At a parish meeting open to all voting members, Fr. Ousley presented the vestry's disaffiliation proposal in detail and outlined the reasons why they recom-

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mended its adoption. Several vestrymen spoke about how and why the vestry had come to its decision. Parishioners—quiet, serious, attentive—asked questions and made observations. Finally, the vote was taken. By a margin of 35-2, out of a total voting membership of 60, the parish endorsed the proposal and authorized the vestry to implement it. Several parishioners who were absent signed a supplemental register endorsing the decision. The vestry, meeting immediately afterwards, unanimously approved the plan and signed the necessary documents, which were then filed on April 26 with the Secretary of State of Pennsylvania.

Reaction and aftermath

Subsequently, on May 5, vestrymen Becky Wilhoite and Karl Spaeth met briefly with Bp. Bennison. After reviewing the events of the past two years, they informed him of the parish's disaffiliation. Appearing to be surprised, the bishop asked if the parish intended to vacate the property. When he was informed that it did not, he immediately indicated that he intended for the Diocese to take legal action to reclaim it. The vestrymen asked the bishop to consider instead a Scriptural resolution of outstanding issues by negotiation. At present, Bp. Bennison has indicated that he will not attempt to undertake canonical and legal action against St. James the Less until avenues for reconciliation have been tried.

Both Bp. Bennison and Fr. Ousley have released statements regarding the disaffiliation action, the contents of which have been widely reported elsewhere (Philadelphia *Inquirer*, May 14; *The Living Church*, May 30; *Pennsylvania Episcopalian*, June). Bp. Bennison also requested an opportunity to meet with the parish to discuss its recent action, to which the congregation agreed. The meeting was held on June 8 (see accompanying articles).

An uncertain future, entrusted to God

For the moment, the Church of St. James the Less is an autonomous Anglican parish, continuing its ministry to its parishioners and the neighborhood. Its future course remains undetermined, as it still faces a threat of diocesan litigation. However, Fr. Ousley noted that the parish remains committed to classical Anglicanism, and so "will need the oversight of a godly bishop, and a connection with the catholic church." While the parish ultimately hopes to re-affiliate formally with an orthodox Anglican province, it is presently exploring various avenues for interim associations. In any event, Fr. Ousley has observed that "our focus both corporately and personally should remain on Christ, our Savior. So long as we remain in Him, there is nothing to fear."

The parish realizes that some people may disagree with its theological positions or with its decision to disaffiliate. However, its faithful members ask for understanding and prayers—for guidance and protection, for humility and charity, both for themselves and for Bp. Bennison and the Diocese. ✙

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ued unity more highly than truth. That view, she maintains, would come as quite a surprise to the Anglican Reformers.

May we also remind you that **cross✙roads** is solely a publication of our local FiF Convocation and does not receive any subsidy from the national or international organizations. If you would like us to continue this ministry, your contribution to offset the cost of printing would be most appreciated.

Editor's Note:

After attending Mass at St. James the Less on Sunday, August 1, Bp. Bennison commented that he enjoyed the beautiful liturgy and the good Biblical sermon. Noting that it was "more of an Episcopal parish than [he] had been led to believe," he informed Fr. Arthur Willis that he would re-issue his license to serve in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. The license arrived in the mail two days later. ✙

Forward in Faith

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all been invited by the abbot of an ecumenical Benedictine community of monks to engage in dialogue and prayer with one another. Under the influence and encouragement of Abbot Alverto Morales, barriers seemed to disappear, and new possibilities emerged for reuniting the faithful. These same monks were brought by Bp. Keith Ackerman to the meeting in Ft. Worth, where they blessed us with soft, prayerful music and a loving presence.

Also adopted at the Ft. Worth meeting was an "Agreed Statement on Communion" to which future Forward in Faith members will be expected to assent. The conference press release explains, "The statement discourages sacramental communion with a person or bishop who, because of 'false teaching, has broken the spiritual communion in Christ.' However, the statement leaves it open for those who assent to it to decide for themselves the nature and nearness of their communion with bishops who ordain women, a number of whom are impeccably orthodox on all other theological quesions . . . . Members viewed women's ordination as only one aspect of a more generalized concern—namely, the rapid secularization of the Episcopal Church, its increasing abandonment of historic moral norms, and its rejection of scriptural authority."

Our Pennsylvania Convocation will play an important role in FiF because three members of Good Shepherd, Rosemont, are in leadership positions. Near the end of the meeting, Fr. David Moyer was contacted and asked to serve as President Pro Tem during the illness of the current president, Walter Bruce. He graciously accepted and was unanimously elected. His wife Rita's seat on the nine-member Executive Council expired, and fellow parishioner Marge Heidengren was elected to fill the position for a three-year term. David Rawson continues as Chancellor to the group. ✙

Marge Heidengren contributed to this article.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.
Hebrews 13:8

An interview at The Church of St. James the Less

Early in July, **cross+roads** co-editor James Altena interviewed Fr. David Ousley, rector of The Church of St. James the Less, and the two vestry members who met with Bishop Bennison on May 8, Karl Spaeth and **cross+roads** editor Becky Wilhoite, regarding the recent disaffiliation action by the parish.

JA: The Forward in Faith (FiF) parishes have lived in "impaired communion" with the Diocese, its bishops, and PECUSA for several years. Why did you decide you had to leave now?

KS: Impaired communion per se is not the issue, although that is a reality, and one with which we were prepared to live up to a point—but only up to a point. After a series of events took matters beyond that point, it became clear that we could no longer continue in an impaired communion, but had to separate.

Fr.: We came to the conclusion that classical Anglican faith and practice were no longer tolerated in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. Bp. Bennison has given us the message ever since he arrived that there would be no accommodation for impairment of communion. He sent that message in a variety of ways, which have been well chronicled, and so we came to the conclusion that there was no longer room for us, and that integrity required that we make it clear where we stand.

JA: What were the most important issues and factors in making your decision to leave?

KS: There are several responses to that. One issue had concerned us for a long time—the role of Scripture, and the extent to which we could continue to worship in accordance with Scripture, in PECUSA. Another was the relationship between the bishop and our parish—the extent to which it was possible to live together and for accommodation to be made for us. Third, however, and the most critical element, was the feeling which had built up in the parish over many years—10 or 15—that we could no longer accept the situation as it existed. The coming together of all these at the same time was what brought the decision to a head.

BW: The most important factor for the timing of the disaffiliation was the action that the bishop took earlier this year in refusing to renew Fr. Willis' license. That was not a situation we could allow to go on indefinitely. It was certainly detrimental to the life of the parish, and an action for which we could find no justification. From this, it was our understanding that the bishop was not inclined to make any compromise to accommodate our theological beliefs.

Fr.: The bottom line was that the New Testament does not allow faithful Christians to abide in unimpaired communion with false teachers. So long as there was some acknowledgment of this and willingness to live with it in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, we could stay. Since that position no longer seems to be acceptable to the bishop and the Diocese, it was necessary to leave.

JA: Has there been any dissent in the parish over the decision to leave? Has anyone felt unwelcome or compelled to leave?

Fr.: There has been remarkable unanimity over the decision, and people from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests all seemed to conclude at the same time that this was the time to do it. The vote was not quite unanimous; whether anyone ends up leaving the parish remains to be seen. I have not heard of anyone who felt unwelcome or personally offended by the decision. Even those who were less enthusiastic about it recognized the necessity of it.

JA: None of the other area FiF parishes has tried to leave the Diocese. Why can't you stay in with them?

Fr.: The FiF parishes all have different local circumstances. While we agree on the operative principles, there are obvious differences in parish dynamics, and thus in how the principles get applied.

BW: Also, we are still connected with the other parishes, even though we are no longer members of PECUSA. We are all members of FiF, a connection that is based on a common understanding of Scripture, and that has not changed.

JA: Why didn't you wait to take common action with the national FiF, or at least your sister FiF parishes in the Diocese, instead of striking out on your own?

BW: I think it's almost impossible for any group of parishes to take concerted action, because the specific situation at each location and the issues that will trigger a response there are different. As long as the parishes agree on the principles of faith, there is going to be a certain unity and mutual support among them. But that doesn't mean that they all have to act in the same way at the same time.

Fr.: We have coordinated our actions with the other FiF parishes in the Diocese. All of us recognize that the parishes are in different places, and so there is also the practical impossibility of trying to do the disaffiliation all at once in all the parishes. The national FiF organization has its own concerns and agenda. Many of the original ESA founders have left since it was started, so it's not clear that FiF is in a position to offer leadership for this sort of a stand.

JA: Is St. James the Less trying to set an example for other FiF parishes to follow?

KS: No, we're not trying to set an example; we're trying to be responsive to the specific situation in our own parish.

Fr.: We're trying to do what was required of us to be faithful. We expect the other FiF parishes to be faithful as well, whether that leads down this particular road or one parallel to it.

JA: Other Anglican traditionalists left PECUSA more than 20 years ago over such issues as women's ordination, Prayer Book revision, and sexual moral standards. Given your stated commitment to classical Anglicanism, why

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didn't you go out then?

Fr.: Hindsight tends to be 20/20, and perhaps we should have left then. The reason we didn't was that it appeared that classical Anglicanism was still tolerated within PECUSA, and it was not clear to us—perhaps it should have been, but it wasn't—that PECUSA was a lost cause for godly religion. So we decided to give it the benefit of the doubt, and stay in as long as we could with principles intact. That became impossible when our position was no longer tolerated, and then we left.

BW: I think there was both a commitment on the part of the parish to remain in PECUSA so long as it was willing to tolerate our beliefs, and a desire not to over-react to any single issue. The action we have taken is the result of a multiplicity of issues that have affected the life and ministry of our parish. Another important point is that the Anglican Communion as a whole, through the bishops who met at Lambeth last summer, voted overwhelmingly in favor of theological stands that we support. They affirmed that parishes should not be forced to accept the ministry of bishops with whom they have theological disagreements, and also voted overwhelmingly to affirm Scriptural principles on marriage. Those things make it clear that the action we have now taken is not really one to separate, but to stand with the Anglican Communion as a whole.

KS: Also—something which classical Anglicans in the USA have repeatedly pointed out, though they have rarely been heard on it—the group which has separated from classical Anglicanism is PECUSA, not us. Where that will lead remains to be seen, but many of us expect the Anglican Communion shortly to do something formally to recognize that fact.

JA: The bishop has said that the parish is doing "a very foolish thing" in disaffiliating. Any comment?

BW: A comment like that is hardly a sound basis for discussing any issues, and certainly does not lead toward any reconciliation or negotiation.

Fr.: I would like to hear the bishop explain why he thinks it's foolish. He was asked that at his meeting with the parish here on June 8th, but did not explain it in a way that I could understand what his thinking is.

JA: The bishop has also said that "in 30 or 40 years, the issues of today will have gone by the board, and...we should not be stampeded by issues of the moment." How would you respond to that?

Fr.: The Christian life is made up of decisions, and most of those are little decisions. We have to make each one as it comes along. It is possible, for example, that in 30 or 40 years pedophilia will be widely accepted; but that's no reason that we should do it now, let alone ever, particularly as we have good reason in Scripture not to do it. We don't know what the church is going to be like in 30 or 40 years. If the bishop honestly thinks that we may be in the center 30 or 40 years from now, then why is he in effect, if not overtly, forcing us out?

BW: I think that the bishop is right, although not necessarily for the reasons he's implying. If PECUSA continues on its present course, it is going to stamp out orthodox dissent, so that the only ones left in it in 30 to 40 years will be those who accept all of the theological revisions they are trying to put in place.

KS: Also, in 30 to 40 years, unless the Anglican communion goes in a direction it presently does not appear to be heading, PECUSA will no longer be part of the Anglican Communion, and instead could be some very radical left-wing splinter group off by itself.

BW: It's certainly out of the mainstream already, and going further afield all the time.

JA: Many bishops and theologians in PECUSA say that Anglicanism has always valued unity above truth, that schism is a worse sin than heresy, and that traditionalists who practice "impaired communion" are the ones actually dividing the Church as the Body of Christ. How would you respond to that?

Fr.: I don't think that they have entirely understood the catholic faith or the Reformers, for whom truth is always the foundation of communion. This gets at the basic divide between the two religions—classical orthodoxy and modern revisionism. For the revisionists, "truth" emerges from the common experience of the community, so that if you don't have the community you don't have truth; whatever the community says is true becomes the truth. For classical Christians, whether Anglican or Protestant or Roman Catholic, truth is prior; God gives us the truth, and He's the one who makes it true, not us. It's true whether we believe it or not, and the communion of the Body of Christ depends upon a shared commitment to that truth. Obviously, there is not always a perfect allegiance to the truth, much less a perfect understanding of it. Nevertheless, without at least a commitment to the principle of God-given truth, it is hard to see how any sort of catholic communion can be practiced. The primacy of truth was, after all, what brought the Reformers in the 16th century to put some distance between themselves and the Roman communion, when the latter would not accept the necessary reformation according to Scriptural truth.

BW: The only basis for unity is conformity to Christ, who called Himself "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." We have not taken any action which could properly be conceived to be schismatic. We have conformed to Biblical and Anglican principles; it is the revisionist-minded bishops who have departed from Catholic doctrine and Biblical principles of morality, and by doing so are the ones who have divided the Body of Christ.

JA: You said that Bp. Bennison's refusal to relicense Fr. Willis as parish curate was the final act that led the parish to disaffiliate. But isn't it the bishop's right and obligation, not yours, to determine the fitness of clergy to serve in the Diocese?

KS: It's a good question, but irrelevant, since the bishop

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never said that Fr. Willis was not acceptable in the Diocese of Pennsylvania—he only said that Fr. Willis was not acceptable at St. James the Less. In other words, the action was taken specifically against us, using Fr. Willis as a vehicle to express his disapproval of us.

BW: And in fact, Bp. Bennison was perfectly willing to license Fr. Willis to serve in any other parish in the Diocese than one belonging to FiF.

Fr.: The bishop has a responsibility for the Diocese. When he decides that Fr. Willis is not fit to serve here, then, because the parish knows Fr. Willis, that is a clear sign that there is no room for us in the Diocese because I don't think you could find a finer priest than Fr. Willis, and if he is not fit, then there is no place for us in the Diocese.

JA: Isn't this primarily a dispute between the bishop and the parish clergy? Why embroil the entire parish in it with such extreme action? Isn't the congregation just doing what its clergy and vestry tell them to do?

KS: The answer to your questions is "No." The situation has been exactly the opposite. I think it's very important to understand that what we have done represents the views of the parish which, as I mentioned before, have built up over a very long period of time. If anything, the clergy and vestry of the parish have been a moderating influence—to try and keep things under control, to keep people thinking clearly, to prevent things from becoming personal, and to direct thought along appropriate Scriptural lines.

BW: I would add that over the last several years we have had over a dozen meetings in which the parish has come together to discuss openly our relationship with the Diocese, at each point where something had happened that could alter that relationship, and we have discussed it together as a family. The congregation has been fully involved at every step, and my reading of our members is that they would have taken action to disaffiliate long ago if it had not been for the calming influence of Fr. Ousley. He has guided us very clearly in situations that could seriously have impaired the ministry of the parish and caused great spiritual loss, if action had been taken unwisely at an earlier time.

KS: To the extent that we did lose people along the way, it was because some believed that we were far too reluctant to take action, and that they had to disassociate themselves from us because of that.

JA: You have stressed that intolerance and not doctrinal disagreement was the main factor in your decision to leave. Bp. Bennison has said, "We're not asking for very much except to be in relationship with them." Why can't you demonstrate a little tolerance and allow him to make an episcopal visitation once every three years?

Fr.: Any relation must have integrity; it must be based on truth about the people that are in the relation. Sometimes that requires intimacy—sometimes that requires distance. A relation of integrity between me and some attractive woman to whom I'm not married requires that I not sleep with her. I think this is what the New Testament has in mind when it tells us that when there are willfully false teachers, the church must not remain in full communion with them. The relation doesn't have integrity. It isn't good for us—it isn't good for them. Part of our call to repentance involves our saying, "We can't sit down with you at the common table." That is a way of calling attention to the seriousness of the dispute. If it were a matter of where to put the dessert fork in the place settings, we could sit down and discuss it over the first course or two of the meal. But if the entree is poisonous, even to sit down imperils your host and the other guests. Thus, unless and until there is repentance, the most charitable thing that we can do for the bishop is to say, "No, we cannot practice full communion with you."

BW: The reason that we find Bp. Bennison and others of similar views unacceptable is that they have publicly departed from Scriptural principles. It's not because we dislike them personally, but because their entire witness and teaching have been contrary to what is taught by the Scriptures.

JA: If you can't allow Bp. Bennison to visit you because he's a false teacher, isn't the real issue truth and not tolerance?

KS: As we understand Scripture, and as Scripture has been understood by the Anglican Communion over hundreds of years, one finds a common view of what Scripture means and what it stands for, a view which has been accepted by orthodox Christians in all times and around the world. I suppose a philosopher might offer a different criterion for "What is truth?", but Tradition certainly provides a binding precedent for us.

Fr.: Tolerance comes in as to why we acted now. If the other side is willing to say that our principles and practices are acceptable and welcome, that's one set of circumstances. If, on the other hand, they say not only that they don't agree with us, but that our convictions and practices are not acceptable, that's a different set of circumstances.

JA: How can you be so sure that you're right, and the Diocese and PECUSA are wrong, about the truth of Scripture? Isn't truth "pluriform," multi-faceted and contextual, as Presiding Bp. Griswold says? Aren't you just being dogmatic and arrogant?

Fr.: The truth of Scripture is what God has put into it. We do not claim to have a complete and infallible grasp of it. But to deny that there is objective truth given to us by God is to be unfaithful to Him; it is in fact to make Him out to be a liar. So we must say that God has spoken, that Jesus is the Truth, that His words are reliable, and that they are simply true in themselves. We try to understand them in faith. We think that the theological enterprise is, as St. Anselm defined it, "faith seeking understanding." On the other side, Bp. Griswold and Bp. Bennison do not look at truth that way. For them, truth

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Hebrews 13:8

Interview

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arises from the experience of the community, and so their authority is different than ours. There is always a danger in defending God's truth that one lapses into pride; but the solution to that is to be humble, not to give up the truth.

BW: In issues of Holy Scripture, we have to trust ourselves to the Holy Spirit, not to worldly theories or our own judgments. Jesus said that He would send the Spirit, "who will lead you into all truth." I think that as long as we are humbly and honestly seeking the will of God, He will reveal that truth to us, and I don't think that there can be any truth without adherence to the Holy Scriptures as traditionally understood. Anyone who set his or her own viewpoints above the Scriptures is departing from the truth, and is in serious error.

KS: Looking at the issue from the other side, what we are being asked to do is to accept views that are contrary to careful thought and interpretation by generations of Christians over hundreds of years.

JA: In his investiture sermon, Bp. Bennison said that the biblical role of a bishop as teacher would define his episcopate. As self-proclaimed traditionalists, on what grounds do you reject his authority to teach and interpret Scripture and oppose your views to his?

BW: Our obedience to the authority of the bishop has to be based on the common adherence to the authority of Scripture, as the ultimate source of the bishop's authority. When he met with our vestry last summer, the bishop clearly told its members that he viewed the source of his authority to be the canons of PECUSA. If that is indeed his view, it makes his role merely an administrative one, not a pastoral one, so he has already placed himself outside the Biblical model by his own admission.

KS: Also, by taking the view that his authority comes from the canons, not Scripture, we have a church that is not governed by Scripture and the will of God, but merely by the deliberations of General Convention. Suppose the delegates at Convention wanted to approve something clearly contrary to Scripture, such as polygamy? They can do that if they want, but that would hardly be a basis for accepting it as consistent with Scripture.

Fr.: The interpretation of Scripture must be based upon an acknowledgment of its truth. That isn't there with Bp. Bennison. As I've said, he has a different view of truth, and thus when he renounces the Scriptural basis of his office, he renounces his authority as a minister of the Gospel.

JA: Bp. Bennison has also emphasized his Scriptural role as overseer and shepherd of the flock. Again, as classical Anglicans, what basis do you claim for rejecting that?

BW: Again, I go back to his own admission that his role is more administrative than pastoral. The Scriptural model is that the bishop is a shepherd of the flock who cares more for his sheep than he does for himself. Frankly, nothing that the bishop has done has indicated that level of concern for either our parish or its individual members.

KS: My impression is that the bishop is much more interested in the sheer number of sheep in his flock than in their spiritual welfare. If he's guiding us anywhere, it's into a barren field.

Fr.: The office and exercise of the ministry is based upon faithfulness to the revelation of Christ; and the bishop, having renounced that—at least, as understood in classical Christianity—undermines his own position.

JA: Let's put the shoe on the other foot. You ask for tolerance from the liberal majority in the Diocese and PECUSA. But when conservatives were in control, they wouldn't allow liberals to have women priests and bishops, or "inclusive language" liturgies, or blessings of homosexual unions. Why should liberals be tolerant of you when conservatives were so intolerant of them?

Fr.: First, I have never been in control of anything, so I cannot take responsibility for what conservatives did. Second, as you pointed out before, there are two issues here, tolerance and truth. We must be faithful to the truth. From what God has given into our hands—that which has been handed on by Scripture and Tradition—we know that it is not good for us to have the things that you mentioned—the "inclusive language," etc. And so we should do our best to make it clear to anyone who is inclined in that direction that God tells us it's not good for us, and that we don't do well to indulge our desires in that regard.

KS: I think it's also worth noting that the ordination of women, which was the first event that characterized the agenda of the revisionist bishops, was done at a time when it was clearly contrary to canon law, and the participating bishops knew and understood it to be unlawful. They discovered that they could do things, and simply claim after the fact that they were answering to a higher authority than the canons, responding to what they said they thought was the will of God. But now that they've changed the canons to read as they wish, they've switched away from what they thought or said was a higher authority at that time and gone back to the canons being the highest authority. They've just taken the shoe off one foot and put it back on the other foot.

BW: It's also important to note that the positions we hold on each of those issues are in complete conformity with those which have been affirmed by catholic Christians throughout the entire history of the Church, and are still held by the majority of Anglican Christians in the world today. We are asking for tolerance of a position which is actually the standard in almost all the rest of the world.

JA: Aren't you just advocating a double standard—"You have to tolerate our views because we're right, but we don't have to tolerate yours because you're wrong"?

KS: We see ourselves as seeking to adhere to a point of view which is the majority view of

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Anglicans around the world. We are not trying to focus on "we're right; they're wrong," but on what are the historically accepted theological views of Anglicans worldwide.

BW: When people are espousing beliefs that are clearly contrary to Scripture, we do have to say something. We can't just ignore that and let it go, since that would only encourage them to continue in that pattern of thinking, and perhaps into acting contrary to Scripture, leading them into sin. We have to be concerned for that.

KS: A good example is same-sex marriage. Our view is the Scriptural view, and what is particularly interesting is how many revisionist bishops will take what is clearly set forth as the Scriptural view and try to say, "Well, maybe it doesn't mean that; perhaps it means something else." Other bishops have plainly admitted that Scripture opposes homosexual relations, and flatly stated that Scripture is wrong. Bp. Bennison, for example, has said publicly that he supports homosexual marriage, and since Scripture does not reflect a modern view of homosexuality, the church can "rewrite" the Bible. This is a view that says, "Take what you like out of the Bible and keep it, and what you don't like, exclude or change." They make Scripture read what they want it to read. For us, that's not an acceptable approach—that's relativism run amok.

BW: We always have to come back to Scripture as the authority. We have to have something in this life which is unchanging, and Christian tradition teaches us that the Bible is the Word of God written, His revelation of His nature. His nature does not change; as it says in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." The principles we have been given don't change, regardless of the temporal circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Fr.: I am unaware of any instance where we have been intolerant. What I think we have said is that God tells us that this is not the way to live. Obviously, there are those who disagree with us, who don't accept the basis on which we make that claim—namely, that the Word of God is true. That means that we don't have a shared authority, which means that we don't have much of a foundation to have an intelligent discussion. That, I think, is what led them to the point where they decided not to tolerate us any more. I can't say that I blame them terribly for it; I think the logic of their position may well demand that they say that we are not a legitimate part of PECUSA.

JA: Doesn't all this come back to the same point—that truth, not tolerance, is the real issue here? Isn't the church fundamentally about truth and not tolerance in your view?

Fr.: The church is of course about truth, because salvation is about truth. But we have been operating on two levels here. There is the practical, ecclesiastical level—why we have to leave now—and that's an issue of tolerance. Then there is the theological and doctrinal level of truth, which is why tolerance is necessary, because there is no longer a shared religion in PECUSA.

BW: If we can first agree on the truth of any matter, that truth can be expressed in a variety of ways, so long as we faithfully express that truth without falsification or distortion. For example, one can go to a parish where the priest celebrates Holy Communion without liturgical vestments or a great deal of ritual, or one can go to another parish which has ornate vestments and incense and lots of candles. Those things aren't of the essence of truth. Belief in the Sacrament, and in the efficacy of the Sacrament for our spiritual benefit, is of that essence. As long as the underlying truth is there, and is followed faithfully, we are certainly willing to tolerate other viewpoints.

KS: It's worth reviewing the history of the 1979 Prayer Book through its trial liturgies up to the time of its adoption. Many parts of it do not simply take Elizabethan language and modernize that, but represent a fundamental change in direction, with very different concepts of what worship should be, and of what ministers and parishioners should be doing. The situation in PECUSA today is a logical development of the changes made in the Prayer Book.

JA: According to PECUSA Canon I.7.4, parish properties and assets belong to PECUSA, and are held and used in trust by local congregations only so long as they are part of PECUSA and their local diocese. In addition, Diocesan Canon 13.4 allows the bishop to issue a unilateral judgment that a congregation has "abandoned the doctrine, discipline and worship" of PECUSA, and move to seize control of parish properties and assets to vest them in the diocesan Church Foundation. Bp. Bennison has indicated that the Diocese could take action to regain the property and assets of SJL. By what right do you claim to keep the church property and assets?

KS: The By-Laws and documents for the incorporation of the Church of St. James the Less, which initially go back over 150 years, are very clear that the property and assets are held by the parish in its own name. There is nothing in our By-Laws or Charter whatsoever that vest any interest in the property or assets in PECUSA or the Diocese. The diocese and national church have taken the position over the years that there is an "implied trust," which was intended to be there all along, and in recent years many parishes have put that into their By-Laws. But we have not, and we reject any such interpretation.

JA: The parish has said that, while in obedience to St. Paul's instructions in I Cor. 6, it did not file suit against the diocese to claim title to the parish property, it will defend itself in court if sued by the Diocese or PECUSA. But in the same passage St. Paul also says that if sued, Christians should "suffer yourselves to be defrauded." How do you justify a defense of yourselves in court in light of Scripture?

KS: There are some cross-

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currents at work here. If one is sued in court, he has two choices—either do nothing and accept an adverse judgment, or defend himself. If we vestry members were being sued as individuals, with consequences only for ourselves, that would be one matter. But the vestry also has a corporate obligation to the members of the congregation to defend their interests if the parish is sued.

BW: One also has to look at the principles St. Paul is addressing here. If our purpose, either in offering a defense or in instigating litigation, were to humiliate our opponents, there would be a spiritual danger to us, because a lot of pride and anger gets into that. I do agree with Karl that we have an obligation to the parish to defend what it stands for. We have a very vital ministry in our neighborhood; we're committed to that. Our view is that this is best done here, with the property we have.

KS: I would emphasize that we have made it very clear that we would regard litigation as something very unfortunate, and have expressed our willingness to the Diocese to attempt to deal with whatever concerns they may have through discussion to avoid litigation.

Fr.: There is also the question of what being faithful to God requires of the parish. Our sense of our vocation is that our calling is to be the church here. Since there is not, so far as we can tell, another place available in the neighborhood, if we are going to be the Body of Christ here, that means doing so with the property. I think that is reasonable grounds for defending ourselves against legal action, but not for initiating it.

JA: Does the parish expect to remain independent indefinitely? If not, what denomination do you expect to join, and how soon?

KS: The short answer is "yes," because we don't have any specific route we are looking to follow at this point, and we don't have another denomination to choose. We have followed the path to where we are now, and will try to discern the road into the future at the appropriate time.

Fr.: As classical Anglicans, we recognize the need for organic relation to the catholic church, and for oversight of a godly bishop. We didn't decide to leave on the basis that there is some place else better to be, but rather that we couldn't remain where we were and be faithful. So we assume that our model is Abraham, who was called out of Ur before he was told where he was going, and having trusted God to take care of his getting out, trusted Him to take care of his getting back in again somewhere else. ✠

Bp. Bennison meets with Parish of St. James the Less

On a sultry summer evening, with only a few fans for relief, a capacity audience assembled on June 8 in the parish house of the Church of St. James the Less to hear Bp. Charles Bennison address the congregation regarding its recent decision to disaffiliate from PECUSA and the Diocese of Philadelphia. Fr. David Ousley opened with prayer, an outline of the basic agenda, and a short statement noting that deep theological divisions with the Diocese had led to the parish's disaffiliation, but that those present had come in charity to hear the bishop's stated request to express his regret over the action and his desire for reconciliation. Each side then introduced outside observers brought in to attend the meeting—neighborhood association representatives and legal counsel for the parish, and diocesan advisors for Bp. Bennison.

Bp. Bennison asks for unity

Bp. Bennison then spoke. Voicing "grief and sorrow" at the parish's disaffiliation and "the loss it means to the Diocese," he suggested that the parish undertake an "indefinite cooling-off period," accompanied by discussions with the diocese, after which they would presumably hold a vote to reconsider their decision. He then passed out photocopies of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians and asked all present to join in reading the entire text aloud, by each person taking turns with a few verses. The congregation, having come instead expressly to hear Bp. Bennison speak to the current issues, simply remained silent, so that only the bishop and four of his advisors read aloud for 15 to 20 minutes.

Bp. Bennison commented briefly on passages in chapters 2 and 4 concerning the unity forged from previous hostility through Christ's reconciliation. In his remarks, he made the novel claim that St. Paul presupposes that all Christians will be in "impaired communion" with one another within the Church, but not in schism, and that unity is more important than differences in race, class or opinion.

The parish calls for faithfulness

Several parishioners then posed questions and made comments to Bp. Bennison regarding his hostile treatment of the parish. Noting that the Diocese had expelled the parish from its Convention last November, and that in his June 1998 meeting with the parish vestry Bp. Bennison himself had stated that traditionalists have no right to act on their convictions if these contravene church canons, they asked why PECUSA, the Diocese, and the bishop himself have not followed his own counsel and practiced tolerance, instead of driving the parish out. Others cited the bishop's refusal to re-license Fr. Willis as parish curate and the grievous injury this had done to the congregation. Bp. Bennison responded by reiterating that he and the Diocese "only ask to be allowed to come and visit once every three years and to be in relationship with you."

Speaking on behalf of the parish, vestry member Becky Wilhoite outlined the recent history of schism in the worldwide Anglican Communion and the resulting persecution of the parish for its traditionalist convictions. [See accompanying article for a full transcript.] At the con-

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Bp. Bennison

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clusion of her address, the room resounded with loud and prolonged applause. Bp. Bennison responded briefly that her remarks were "for the most part accurate," and that he wished again to express his sorrow for the parish's sense of alienation and his hope that it would reconsider its action. He then passed out photocopies of the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" and asked all present to sing it together. The meeting formally concluded with prayers by Bp. Bennison, who did not offer to bless the congregation. ✠

Bethlehem

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church politics in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. His admonitions were largely heeded. A joyous atmosphere prevailed as the service progressed, with elements of liturgy drawn from the various parishes represented. Fr. Lyman of St. John's called the service a "wonderfully Christ-centered event."

Afterwards, several guests commented on how well the service had gone and expressed appreciation to Bp. Marshall for his gracious provision and to Fr. Joseph Falzone for hosting the event. One attendee noted that it was especially encouraging for those present to participate in the Eucharist together, just as they stand together for Anglican tradition and gospel truth. In a letter to his congregation, Fr. David Moyer of Good Shepherd reminded them that their "calling is to remain steadfast to the glorious gift of the Catholic religion as expressed in the Anglican Tradition, and to speak the truth in love."

Fr. Falzone read a statement from Bp. Marshall which said that he had been asked by the Presiding Bishop not to attend the event. Bp. Marshall's break with the current trend of marginalizing faithful parishes had not gone unnoticed at 815. Despite this appeal, however, Bp. Marshall was present although he did not vest for the service.

Bp. Bennison had also sought to prevent the Whitehall visitation from occurring. At a meeting with Bps. Marshall and Bennison in New York the previous weekend, Presiding Bp. Griswold reportedly asked Bp. Marshall to cancel his invitation to Bp. Parsons. Bp. Marshall declined to do so.

In a letter explaining his decision to the clergy of his diocese, while declaring that he "joyfully and thankfully ordains women," Bp. Marshall expressed his concern for ESA parishes elsewhere that are denied episcopal ministrations because they cannot in good conscience receive bishops who perform such ordinations. Decrying the "increasing polarization" within PECUSA, the bishop called his decision an act of pastoral concern that created "something like a 'a city of refuge' for those who, for whatever reason, find it desirable to worship with like-minded bishops." He gave his permission to ESA Bps. Parsons and Keith Ackerman to "enter this diocese [Bethlehem] to preach and celebrate the sacraments at any time."

Bp. Marshall, while noting that his actions would most directly affect the Diocese of Pennsylvania, declined to take any "public position on the rights and wrongs of the positions and strategies adopted by the Bishop of Pennsylvania and the rectors and vestries of the ESA parishes," since he "may be called upon to help adjudicate" their dispute. His primary concern, he said, was the needs of individual disciples who desired to receive the Church's initiatory rites so they could "get on with things in their walk with God." Bp. Marshall reminded his readers that "these are not rites implying fealty to a particular person or territory....The bishop confirms as an apostle, a representative of the Catholic Church, not as caliph of a local clan."

In public statements, Bp. Bennison and Diocesan Chancellor William Bullitt alleged that both Bp. Marshall and the participating parishes acted in violation of church canons by interfering in the jurisdiction of another diocese and evading a requirement that confirmands be presented to their diocesan bishop. The rectors of the three ESA parishes involved—Frs. Philip Lyman, David Moyer, and Richard Smith—have also received "Letters of Solemn Warning" from Bp. Bennison directing them not to participate in any such action again.

On a related note, Bp. Marshall also voiced sympathy for those "who have been alienated or whose faith has been injured by any insensitivity in imposing the prayer book of 1979." He announced plans to seek at General Convention in the year 2000 a formal apology to prayer book traditionalists for their mistreatment within PECUSA, and to introduce legislation requiring that supplemental liturgical material include the 1928 prayer book. ✠

Christians first—Anglicans always

The following remarks were given by Becky Wilhoite, speaking on behalf of the vestry of St. James the Less, at the meeting with Bishop Bennison on June 8, 1999.

For the sake of those members of the parish who may not have been here for very long and for our guests this evening, it seems appropriate that we relate a bit of history, to give some indication of the events which led to our parish's disaffiliation earlier this spring.

As [parishioner] Sam White noted a few moments ago, St. James the Less has been here for more than 150 years. In 1995 we celebrated the beginning of our sesquicenten-nial year with a commemorative Mass. Our preacher on that occasion, Fr. David Kennedy, reminded us of the order of our priorities: we are Christians first, Catholics second, Anglicans third, and Episcopalians fourth. It is indeed a cause for sorrow that St. James the Less has felt it necessary to separate itself from the Episcopal Church in order to remain faithful Anglican Catholic Christians. It is even more regrettable, however, that one part of the Body of Christ, the Episcopal Church, should have departed so far from traditional

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Hebrews 13:8

Letter to the Editor

Dear People,

Please remove us from your mailing list as we are no longer Episcopalians, and I am Eastern Orthodox.

Thank you for all you did for us—you are *really* good people! I hope we can be unified some day—if not in this world let us hope for the next.

Love in the Lord

Lynn Horng

Christians first

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Anglican, Catholic, and Christian teachings and beliefs that it is in danger of isolating itself from the body of faithful believers throughout the world.

The seed of this division was sown 25 years ago with the irregular ordination of eleven women to the priesthood, an action which took place here in this very diocese. Such an action was a serious departure from traditional catholic doctrine and order.

This seed took root and flourished in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer which espoused a radically different theology from all previous prayer books and which represented a departure from the prayer books in use in the other Anglican provinces.

This division blossomed and produced not just impaired communion but, in my view, full-blown schism with the 1989 consecration of Barbara Harris as Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts. When the bishops of this diocese participated in that service, they knowingly and willfully introduced a breach of communion—not just between the Diocese and St. James the Less, but also between the Episcopal Church and other Anglican provinces, and between the Episcopal Church and the rest of the holy catholic Church.

St. James the Less responded by withholding its episcopal assessment. I was not here at that time, but I believe I understand their reason for doing so. It was not appropriate for us to continue to support bishops whose sacramental ministry we could not accept because of their departure from historic Anglican and Catholic doctrine. We did, however, continue to pay the other assessment which was required of us—the clergy financial assistance assessment.

Bishop Bartlett certainly did not agree with our position, but he had enough respect for our parish and our ministry that he did not attempt to force a sacramental visitation which we could not have accepted. He did visit the parish on several occasions, meeting with the vestry and having dinner with our young people.

In 1995 Bishop Bartlett signed what became known as the Parsons Agreement, a document which allowed St. James the Less and other like-minded parishes to receive the episcopal ministry of Bishop Parsons, a retired Bishop of Quincy. The diocese asked in return that each parish resume payment of their episcopal assessment. At St. James the Less, this condition created quite a dilemma.

The vestry did not wish to make a decision without consulting the rest of the congregation. At a parish meeting, there were two predominant viewpoints. The first maintained that the parish had withheld the assessment on theological grounds, that there had been no theological change on the part of the diocese, and thus there was no reason to pay the assessment. The second recognized that a parish which is not in communion with its bishop can easily slide into congregationalism.

After hearing the discussion, the vestry voted 7-4 to accept the agreement and pay the assessment. Three of the four members who voted against the agreement resigned because they could not in good conscience support the vestry's action. It speaks well for the unity of the parish that those three members remained active and faithful parishioners.

This agreement expired in 1997 and was not renewed by Bishop Bartlett. After Bishop Bennison took office in May 1998, our vestry asked him to meet with us in June to determine if there were any means of resolving our differences. For me, there were two principal issues which were raised at that meeting. First, when he was asked about the source of his authority as a bishop, Bishop Bennison referred to the canons, not to the Scriptures. Such an interpretation gives him an administrative role rather than a pastoral one. Second, when we asked what freedom we had to express our beliefs, he replied that we could believe anything we wanted; but if those beliefs led us to take any action which violated the canons, we would be stopped. I pointed out that we did not believe it was possible to hold a belief and act in a manner contrary to that belief. To do so would be a denial of the belief. The Bishop's reply (which I believe I am quoting accurately) was, "Then you have a problem." I agree, sir, that there is a problem. I do not believe I am the cause of it.

After this meeting it was clear to the vestry that Bishop Bennison would not tolerate any dissension within the ranks of this diocese. The subsequent months brought a series of events, each of which resulted in a parish meeting to discuss its effects upon our relationship with the diocese and the Episcopal Church.

In August, the bishops of the Anglican Communion met at the Lambeth Conference and passed a number of resolutions, one of which urged accommodations for those who could not in good conscience accept the ordination of women to the priesthood. Bishops were asked to refrain from forced visitations.

In September Bishop Bennison did cancel his announced visit to St. James the Less. However, the notice of this cancellation did not arrive until the week after the proposed visitation. When it did arrive, the notice was in the form of a letter to Fr. Ousley, threatening him with presentment and trial for his unwillingness to receive the Bishop.

In November the Diocesan Convention voted to "expel" St. James the Less and four other parishes which had not paid the episcopal assessment. This action was taken despite the fact that the convention does not have canonical authority to expel a delegation, only to "deny

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Christians First

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voice and vote."

This was done even though the beliefs of the five expelled parishes would have permitted them to remain members in good standing in any other province of the Anglican Communion. This action sent a clear message to our parish that the diocese was no longer willing to tolerate our presence because of the difference in our theological positions.

Even though this action was hurtful to us, in December the vestry again authorized payment of our assessment for clergy financial assistance and the retired clergy medical assessment. We belived that as long as we were part of the diocese, we should meet those obligations which did not violate our conscience.

In January, Bishop Bennison took an action which we could not ignore when he refused to renew Fr. Willis's license to serve in this parish. To deny any priest the right to exercise his ministry is a serious matter, one which should only be taken because of some grave misconduct on the part of the priest. In this case, Fr. Willis's only fault was choosing to serve in this parish.

The Bishop's action was one which could not produce a good result, one which was clearly intended to hurt the parish. Depriving us of the ministry of this gentle, good, and godly man could only be detrimental to our life at St. James the Less.

Knowing that the canons allow a priest to function for only 60 days without a license, the vestry discussed what would happen at that time. Fr. Willis preferred to remain here in a pew rather than to serve elsewhere at an altar, a decision for which we are truly grateful. In a parish meeting to review the situation, Fr. Ousley outlined the history of our relationship with the diocese and summarized the three options which were presently available to us:

We could renounce our beliefs and accept the sacramental ministry of the diocesan bishops. This course might have resulted in the renewal of Fr. Willis's license, but it is doubtful that he would have wished to continue serving a parish which had abandoned its beliefs. This course also held considerable peril to our souls if we violated our conscience and took actions which would jeopardize our full communion with other Anglican provinces.

We could do nothing—waiting for a change on the part of Bishop Bennison or for intervention from other Anglican provinces, neither of which are certainties. In the meantime, the parish would be deprived of Fr. Willis's ministry.

We could recognize that the parish could no longer remain in affiliation with a diocese which had threatened our rector, expelled our parish from the convention, and refused to license our curate—or with a national church which had mandated the acceptance of women's ordination, refused the stop the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals, and failed by only one vote to approve the preparation of rites to bless same-sex marriages.

The vestry was prepared to act, but those of you who have been around St. James the Less for very long know that nothing happens quickly here. If we had done so, it might have been the right action at the wrong time.

Instead, we wanted to be sure that the parish was in agreement with any action we took so we called for a period of prayer during Lent to discern the right course of action.

We had originally scheduled the parish meeting to discuss our disaffiliation in March. However, at our vestry meeting on March 1, Fr. Ousley told us of the letter he had received from Bishop Bennison advising the clergy of his impending surgery. We did not believe it would be right to present him with such a weighty dilemma at a time when he needed to concentrate on his own healing and recovery. We postponed the meeting and rescheduled it for April 25.

The purpose of the parish meeting was to vote on a resolution authorizing the vestry to proceed with disaffiliation. Immediately following the vote which overwhelmingly supported the resolution, the vestry met and unanimously authorized our attorney to take the necessary legal steps to effect the disaffiliation. On April 26 the legal papers were filed. On April 27 I called Bishop Bennison's secretary to request a meeting with him at his earliest convenience. We wanted him to hear the news of our disaffiliation from us, not second- or third-hand from the ecclesiastical grapevine.

On May 5 Karl Spaeth and I met with Bishop Bennison and advised him of our disaffiliation from the Diocese of Pennsylvania and from ECUSA. We assured him that it was not our intent to lead others out of the diocese, nor did we intend to affiliate with any other body at this time. We will remain an independent parish until we have clearly discerned where God intends us to be.

The bishop's first question was whether or not we intended to vacate the property. We told him that we have absolutely no intention of doing so. The parish is ours and we intend to remain here, fulfilling our ministry to the congregation and the neighborhood.

He commented that he would have to contact the Chancellor and initiate legal action to retain the property. We assured him that such an action was both unnecessary and undesirable. It would present a very poor witness to those outside the church if we, as Christians, could not settle our disputes without resorting to courts. The bishop agreed with this point.

The vestry had decided earlier (against the advice of our attorney) not to initiate legal action against the diocese because we took seriously the admonition of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 that Christians should not take each other to court. Karl and I assured Bishop Bennison that we would consider any good faith offers to negotiate an amicable separation and expressed a hope that he and the Chancellor would seek suitable alternatives to litigation.

I would caution you, however, not to misinterpret our unwillingness to initiate legal action as a reluctance to defend ourselves should litigation be

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filed against us. For the sake of our founders and benefactors, for the sake of those souls buried in our churchyard, for the sake of this neighborhood (especially for the children who come to our Sunday School, day camp, and the parish school which will open this fall), for the sake of all those who ever have or ever will come to this sacred place to pray, to worship, to hear the Gospel preached, or to receive the sacraments at the hands of faithful priests—we will vigorously defend any action which might be taken against us.

Hebrews 13:8

A cloud of witnesses

Barbara Bradley

God having provided some better thing for us, that they [heroes of the Faith] without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. (Hebrews 11:40-12:3)

Throughout the ages, from Biblical times to our own day, we have brothers and sisters who have gone before us. Their strong lives of faith encourage us in these times. One of the more reassuring things about our Anglican tradition is that our worship services provide us with concrete reminders concerning the lives of the saints and the worldwide church. Our liturgy reminds us through its communal nature that we are not alone. We are participants in the larger body of Christ's Church, both past and present, both here and abroad.

Church history gives us the Reformers' example to show us how to stand, even at great cost, against a corrupt hierarchy. They were following Christ's model and trusting in God, just like the heroes of the faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. The verses quoted above remind us of our link with all these saints.

The Reformers bridge the gap between the Biblical heroes of faith and those of our own times. They sought to bring the Church back to a more Scriptural base. They also fought the pressure to conform and remain in a corrupt ecclesiastical establishment. Given our situation here in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, I believe there is encouragement to be had from our forebears of the Reformation. Many of them did not desire schism for the sake of division; rather, they wished to correct the errors which had crept into the Roman church. As we well know, these attempts at correction were taken as innovation, schism, and heresy. We shall likely have several such adjectives attached to our actions as well.

Yes, the forces arrayed around us are considerable [in terms of legalities, loaded canon courts, etc.]. Yet, I believe that the Reformers would see our situation as analogous to their own. Corrupt hierarchies, plots, and machinations behind the scenes were all too familiar to them also. Nevertheless, their message shines down to us in the midst of suspense and uncertainty. Stand firmly on Scripture, and refuse to be moved from its Truth.

The Reformers realized that unity at the expense of Truth was not true unity, and that authority not based on Scripture was improper authority. Or as Cranmer said, "If there were any word of God beside the Scripture, we could never be certain of God's word; and if we be uncertain of God's word, the devil might bring in among us a new word, a new doctrine, a new faith, a new church, a new god, yea, himself to be god."

Many Reformers paid the ultimate price for their views during the reign of Queen Mary. But we who are ingrafted into Christ's church (Rom. 11:17) are united with such as these, under Our Lord Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And as Christ's bride, the church is designed to be a unity, for only together with us will the Bride be made perfect.

We also have the example of Christ Himself. St. Paul reminds us that Jesus also faced a corrupt religious establishment, more interested in exercising power and gaining prestige than in giving proper service to God. In the process of bearing our sins, Our Lord took on the power brokers of Judea and felt the weight of their corruption. Let us indeed fix our eyes on Him, and strengthen our resolve.

Finally, we have the courageous pattern of brothers and sisters who are separated from us more by geography than time. We have more commonality of faith with our African and Asian friends than with our fellow unbelieving Episcopalians. I am especially thankful for the interest of the East African bishops, particularly the Rwandans. As we have more contact with these men of faith, they challenge us to deepen our own commitment, to strengthen weak arms and weak knees and endure hardship as the discipline of God. This is as it should be. Iron sharpens iron.

They challenge us to tackle the culture of death head-on by subverting the meaning of the AIDS slogan, "silence = death." If we are silent in our witness to lost people, they will die in their sins. After seeing tragedy in Rwanda on a mind-numbing scale, they have realized that there is something worse than physical death—spiritual death. They will not keep silent and let the American church slide into that night. (Their support is the more poignant since we in the West sat by and did nothing for them.) Like the Reformers, the African bishops are men of principle, and we are humbled by their example.

The bishops are not alone in East Africa. Often laity share a similar faith commitment. Bill Atwood of Ekklesia relayed the following story upon his return from Uganda. He had been telling a group of believers about the circumstances in the Ameri-

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can church. After some discussion in the local language, the group decided that the proper thing to do was send over some missionaries since so many people in the American church had fallen away. They proceeded to hold a sale to support this missions initiative. Someone got out an extra shirt; others dipped into their stores of grain. Presently, Bill saw a bowl of peanuts being passed down the line. The peanuts were put into a kerchief, and the bowl was passed back to an older woman, amid much discussion. When Bill asked what the commotion was about, the translator told him that the older lady had given her only store [the peanuts] and that they were returning the bowl because it was the only one she had. Indeed, this was a contemporary illustration of the widow's mite.

Since 1994 I have been praying about how to increase our ties with the world-wide church. Perhaps the answer is our present dilemma. God may be using church politics to awaken and strengthen us. The Primates of other provinces of the Anglican Communion have set out to enforce Lambeth's resolutions. As a result, people in America are realizing that the church is not merely a local institution. There is a growing realization that our common cause may be with our brethren on distant shores.

I pray that those who are mourning the demise of Episcopal unity will understand that it is not a matter of leaving what we have always held to be the Faith, but rather leaving in order to continue to hold the true Faith, and to join with the majority of faithful Anglicans in other locales. ✠

Barbara Bradley is a parishioner at St. John's, Huntingdon Valley.

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A prayer

O Lord, prepare my heart, I beseech thee, to reverence thee, to adore thee, to love thee; to hate, for love of thee, all my sins and imperfections, short-comings, whatever in me displeaseth thee; and to love all which thou lovest, and whom thou lovest. Give me, Lord, fervour of love, shame for my unthankfulness, sorrow for my sins, longing for thy grace, and to be wholly united with thee. Let my very coldness call for the glow of thy love; let my emptiness and dryness, like a barren and thirsty land, thirst for thee, call on thee to come into my soul, who refreshest those who are weary. Let my heart ache to thee and for thee, who stillest the aching of the heart. Let my mute longings praise thee, crave to thee, who satisfiest the empty soul that waits on thee.

E.B. Pusey, 1800-1882